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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how to teach art history in college level interdisciplinary courses. Today, art historians find themselves involved in teaching art history not only in art history curricula, but also in interdisciplinary studies, such as Ancient Greek Culture, Renaissance in France, and Women in Art. When teaching art history in interdisciplinary courses, art historians must include in their discussions some basic aesthetic values and critical judgments. Among these, the art historian must emphasize that the art works studied are unique, and that they have value in themselves as well as in relation to other works of art or the period. The art historian must find a way within the constraints of the interdisciplinary course to ensure that the student comprehends the artistic aims, conventions, meanings, as well as the broader cultural significance of a period such as classical Greek or Renaissance culture. The three approaches generally used in art history are formalistic (Berenson), iconographic (Panofsky), and cultural (Gombrick). When teaching artworks in interdisciplinary courses, there is no need for the art historian to conform to these methods. The paper next addresses the problem of what appropriate art works to select for the interdisciplinary course. What becomes important is that the subject of the art works relate to the theme established in the course. Therefore, the interpretation of the art work must point in the same direction as the philosophical, literary, sociological, and/or psychological quests. The paper concludes with a discussion of how to grade students and what to request of interdisciplinary students in terms of academic work. (Author/RM)

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TEACHING ART HISTORY IN INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSES

by

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It is important that we address ourselves, once again, to the question of teaching introductory art history courses. In particular, we should raise the questions of how to teach art history in interdisciplinary courses or so-called "humanities" courses.

Today, with the proliferation of interdisciplinary courses taught at colleges and universities, art historians find themselves involved in teaching art history not only in art history curricula, but also in interdisciplinary studies, such as Ancient Greek Culture, Renaissance in France, Women and Art. Since the teaching of art history in interdisciplinary courses differs from the teaching of art history in courses that are strictly art history, art historians must reevaluate the role of the art historian and methods of teaching art history.

Some of the questions which we need to ask are general and relate to the nature of art history. These are pedagogical and methodological questions. For example, how should art history be taught in these "humanities" courses? What art historical approach, if any, should be used? Is the teaching of art history in interdisciplinary programs an expansion of our art historical goals? Other questions address specific, practical issues. For example, is it important to teach art history in interdisciplinary courses in order to explain the artistic development of human beings? What art works reflect upon, contrast with or support ideas current in the time period selected, or what works represent the themes discussed? I plan to answer these questions in this presentation, with the hope of obtaining an understanding of our role and function given present intellectual and academic needs.

Reconsideration of our present approach to the teaching of art history may arouse many types of response among art historians. Unfortunately, some may be negative at first, since the questions which we ask now are questions that often have been categorized as mere "education" questions, not pertinent to the discipline of art history. But I am optimistic that the majority of us will agree that we need to clarify our role and methods of teaching art history in interdisciplinary courses.

As we address ourselves to the first question "What is the role of the art historian in teaching art history in interdisciplinary courses?" we observe that the task of the art historian in teaching art history in interdisciplinary courses is both rewarding and demanding.

Art history as a discipline is in itself an interdisciplinary study. An art historian by the nature of the discipline discusses in studying the creation of an art work its historical, philosophical and socio-political implications. Theoretical approaches to a work of art consider it first as an object in itself, then as that which presents a subject. As an object or form it is analyzed in terms of its style or visual elements - color, line, shape, tone and texture - and its subject matter or content is interpreted in terms of its symbols. Then, the art work is studied and placed in its historical context where philosophical questions, socio-political issues and psychological aspects are considered - how do they affect the conventions of that moment in art? how do they impinge upon the artist? how do they determine the period, define a nation, and eventually, shape the continuum of art history? For example, in introductory courses in art history, namely SURVEY OF ART AND ART APPRECIATION, the art historian considers, particularly in ART APPRECIATION, the artistic

techniques, influences and innovations in art works, that is to say, the style of works of art. And too the art historian, presents an interpretation or iconography of the subject matter. When the art course taught is the SURVEY OF ART, the above considerations of style and iconography are presented chronologically, whereas in the ART APPRECIATION course, this approach is not necessary. In ART APPRECIATION, the approach to the study of art history is to encourage the student to recognize certain artistic techniques and achieve some understanding of the aesthetic questions of art history. In the SURVEY OF ART course the goal is to learn about the art works as they arise in time and space and to recognize that they were created in an artistic milieu and grow out of an historical period of nationality. The teaching of art history in interdisciplinary course is demanding because it forces the art historian to study the art work apart from its chronological historical setting and from within a new frame of reference. This new frame of reference is usually established by the use of philosophical or literary texts of the time. The art historian must now select art works that fill out these philosophical or literary texts rather than choosing contemporary art works that help explain each other as art; for example, the art work in question is studied in relation to philosophical or sociological issues or the art object visually illustrates a passage from a literary text of the time. When teaching art history in interdisciplinary components, that is to say, as part of a survey of cultural ideas, such as WESTERN CULTURAL HERITAGE or HUMANITIES, art historians must assume in their discussions some basic aesthetic values and critical judgments. Among these, the art historian must emphasize that the art works studied are unique, and that they have

value in themselves as well as in relation to other works of art or the period.

Another matter not considered in interdisciplinary courses is the issue of periodization in art, and the validity of conventional definitions of periods, such as the Archaic period, the period of Mannerism, the Baroque, the Rococo period, and recent periods of Naturalism and Realism. These are pertinent to art historical concerns but not relevant to interdisciplinary studies. The student should be made aware of the difficulties of defining a period of art chronologically and stylistically but the complexity of the endeavor itself, while within the scope of an art history course is beyond that of an interdisciplinary class.

Some familiarity with terminology and ideas of periodization in art is necessary to the study of art works but these should not become the focus of the discussion. Furthermore, concerns of periodization differ among the disciplines of history, literature and art history. For example, according to art historians, Renaissance art appears in approximately 1400 and continues until 1520; while historians claim that the Renaissance period continues throughout the seventeen century; and for the literary critic the Renaissance starts with Petrarch in the thirteen century. Other examples, can be found in the study of the terms "classicism" and "baroque" as applied to the seventeen century or "neoclassicism" and "romanticism" to the nineteenth century. The need to present a structured introductory course to the beginning student is important since such a course establishes a basis for learning (And it is a fact that most interdisciplinary courses are introductory courses). But what becomes significant to the art historian is to find a way within the constrants of the inter-

disciplinary course to ensure that the student comprehends the artistic aims, conventions, meanings, as well as the broader cultural significance of a period such as classical Greek or Renaissance culture.

The next questions that we may consider is what are the historical approaches to art history and can any of these approaches be useful in the study of art history in interdisciplinary courses?

The art historical approaches in the past have been generally divided in three categories: (1) formalistic (Berenson), (2) iconographic (Panofsky) and (3) cultural (Gombrich). The formalistic approach emphasizes the importance of the art work in terms of its style, that is to say the form of the art work. The iconographic method stresses interpreting the meaning of the art object, its symbols and its milieu. The cultural analysis aims to study the art work as an outcome of its society; the art work has its chief significance as the byproduct of its environment.

Sometimes one approach is more valid for the study of an art work from one period than from another: for example, in the study of Impressionism, the formalistic and cultural approaches are more helpful than the iconographical; whereas, in the study of Renaissance Art, a combination of the three methods will be more valuable for an understanding of the artistic quest. But, of course, when studying artworks in interdisciplinary courses, there is no need to conform to these methods, not because they are not meaningful but because the art work must be viewed from still another perspective being used to illustrate a point, to parallel a literary idea or to express a psychological insight.

Now, the problem becomes, what appropriate art work or group of works should the art historian select for the interdisciplinary course or courses? Of course, the selection depends on the nature of the interdisciplinary course. Is the approach of the interdisciplinary course a thematic (HUMAN SITUATION IN WESTERN CULTURE) or chronological (WESTERN CULTURAL HERITAGE)?

If the approach to the interdisciplinary course is THEMATIC, such that the interdisciplinary study in literature, philosophy, history and psychology emphasizes a specific theme, namely the human condition, or evil, love, death, or nature, landscape, the individual and God, man and his society, then, the task of the art historian is easier in the sense that the selection of art works does not depend upon an historical correlation between the art works and the progress of the sister disciplines. What then becomes important in the selection of the art work is that the subject relate to the theme established in the interdisciplinary course. Therefore, the interpretation of the art work must point in the same direction as the philosophical, literary, sociological and/or psychological quests. Historical placement and the environment of art historical concerns in which the art work was created become unimportant. The stylistic conventions by which the art work was created also are secondary. I wonder, Byzantine painting, for example, with its thematic abstract representation has its origin in a theology and its thematic relation in the trends of assumptions made about man and God. And what is now crucial is the interpretation of the subject matter - the meaning expressed in the art work and the responses it evokes today or at the time of its creation. For example the selection of art historical works can illustrate philosophical

and literary ideas without historically accompanying the interdisciplinary subject, such as Romanticism, or Classicism.

A historical approach in the proper development of a theme such as nature or love may be used in order to study the variety of artistic interpretations of a particular subject. For instance, a series of landscape scenes can be introduced dating from ancient times to the present. In this case, however, elaboration on artistic techniques or aesthetic judgments will not be appropriate and would be confusing to the student.

If the approach to the interdisciplinary course is chronological, that is to say, if literary texts, philosophical works and socio-political ideas are studied in their historical sequences, let us say, from ancient to medieval times, or the events causing the Reformation, and so forth, then the task of the art historian is more complex. The selection of art works must be related to the historical times as well as parallel the philosophical ideas, literary texts and socio-economical problems presented. Art works often do not parallel contemporary philosophical and literary ones or do not reflect historical movements, as for example high Renaissance with political upheavels in Rome and Florence which have no manifestation in the idealized art of Michelangelo and Raphael. On the other hand, in some contexts, the selection of art works can strengthen and parallel, or at times, even follow the interpretation of literary works, as for example, during the nineteenth century in which the Symbolist literary movement was influential in the art works of Redon, and Moreau. The same can be claimed for the Futurist and Surrealist movements in literature reflected in art. And, of course, in this case the ancient motto "ut pictura poesis" - as is painting so is poetry - is precisely apt.

Turning now to more practical matters. After having selected an approach through which to teach an interdisciplinary course - thematic or chronological - and the appropriate visual material to support the discussion of literary texts, philosophical problems or social issues, the next concern is how to grade students and what to request of interdisciplinary students in terms of academic work. The usual short papers, quizzes, and essay exams are extremely helpful in ensuring that the student keeps abreast of the material.

Papers in art history should be short, two to four pages. The emphasis should be on selecting an art work from a gallery or museum. The study of this art work should elaborate chiefly its formal qualities. This type of short paper will help the student to become familiar with the terminology of art in order to describe in writing the visual experience in a coherent fashion. The length of the paper is not too important; what is significant is the descriptive and analytical exercise that comes from writing out what the student observes. The topic or selection for the paper topic can vary. Topics can be merely suggested in order to increase motivation and individuality in research or they can be specified to insure that certain key ideas are comprehended and expressed clearly. To be sure, the topics must be related to the interdisciplinary studies, for example, the theme of evil, love, nature, self, and man-God-and society.

The idea of testing periodically with slide quizzes and comparative slide exams is very helpful to the student. The need for instant visual recall and immediately available methods of analysis will encourage the student to keep up with the readings. Of course, major exams should deal more precisely with the integration of art historical data, its meaning and implications for the philosophical, literary and

socio-political point of view. The essay questions should aim for the student's overall understanding of the achieving period such as Greek, Renaissance, or Reformation.

Finally, field trips, exhibitions and museum visits are crucial for the learning experience of art. They bring students into direct contact with the art work. Students are able to relate to the art work in terms of its physical condition and properties, and then can create comparative ideas in relation to other art works. All of a sudden the art object for the student is real and concrete, not a photographic image reproduced in a screen. For example, if an architectural structure is visited, I require that the student draw a simple ground floor plan of the building in order to define the boundaries of the space and to comprehend the enclosure of the space. Perhaps field trips may appear unrelated to interdisciplinary study, but it is the experience of various aspects of disciplines - their laws, principles, theories and complexities, particularly of the humanities that should intrigue students and make them aware of many wonderful learning possibilities.